

Remarks Honoring African-American Veterans of World War II *September 16, 1994*

Thank you very much, Congressman Rangel, Secretary Brown, Chairman Mfume, other members of the Congressional Black Caucus, and to all of the veterans of our Armed Forces who are here, to your family members and friends, my fellow Americans. I am proud to be here to honor the African-American veterans of World War II.

This is a distinguished generation in the history of African-American military service. But you belong to a legacy older than the Declaration of Independence, one that includes the legendary service of the Massachusetts 54th in our Civil War, the Buffalo Soldiers in the West, the 92d Division in World War I.

Congressman Rangel, I'm sure most of you know, is a decorated veteran of the Korean war, and he had a son who served in the United States Marine Corps. I want to recognize his service and that of the other veterans of the Congressional Black Caucus: Congressmen Blackwell, Bishop, Clay, Conyers, Dellums, Dixon, Jefferson, Rush, Stokes, Scott, and Towns.

I also want to acknowledge our Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Jesse Brown. I'm grateful to have him in my Cabinet not only because he is the first African-American Secretary of Veterans Affairs but because he is a genuine hero of our military service and someone, as Congressman Rangel said, who has been a Secretary of Veterans Affairs and a secretary for America's veterans. I was telling him on the way over here, I had just gotten another one of his letters reminding me that there was something else I should have done that I had not yet done for the veterans of this country. *[Laughter]* I told him, when we had our little interview before I became President, that I expected him not only to be loyal to me but loyal to you and that as long as he were honest and straightforward with me, he could fulfill both loyalties. I can honestly say he is doing his best to follow my admonition. *[Laughter]*

I want to note that today is also POW/MIA Recognition Day, a day to recognize those Americans who were held prisoner of war or those who remain unaccounted for, the missing who never received their proper welcome home.

They are not forgotten. The United States stands firmly resolved to help their young loved ones find the answers they deserve. And even today, we are working hard and investing a significant amount of money in that endeavor in Southeast Asia.

For decades, African-American veterans were missing in our Nation's memories of World War II. For too long, you were soldiers in the shadows, forgotten heroes. Today it should be clear to you, all of you, you are forgotten no more. I'm very proud of your service to our country. You've protected and expanded the freedoms that all the rest of us enjoy today. Our Nation's debt to you can never be fully repaid, but we can certainly honor your service, as we do today.

Americans endured much during World War II, the terrible loss of lives, the separation of families and loved ones, the interruptions of life on the homefront. All our people felt some of that. But no group of Americans endured what African-Americans endured in uniform. You had to win the right to fight the enemy we faced in common. You endured the indignities of double standards for black troops, the put-downs, the segregated units and bases, some of which gave you less freedom to move than German prisoners of war. You defended America with no guarantees that your own freedom would be defended in return.

I'm just reading the new book by Doris Kearns Goodwin about World War II and President and Mrs. Roosevelt, war on the homefront, war abroad. She was constantly urging her husband to try to do something about the double standard accorded to African-American people in the military and demanded, among other things, that people who wanted to enlist in the Navy ought to be able to do something besides work in the mess.

We've come a long way since then, largely because of you and many tens of thousands like you who disproved the false stereotypes, who showed that American troops were, are, and always will be the best trained, the best prepared fighting force in history, regardless of the color of their skin. In fact, units comprised entirely or mostly of African-Americans performed remarkably, groups honored today such as the

famed Tuskegee Airmen. This is something—[*applause*]*—*to the Tuskegee Airmen, stand up there. When I was in Europe recently to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Italy and Rome and D-Day, I was escorted on part of my journey by a Tuskegee Airman from my home State who told me what is now in my notes here—[*laughter*]*—*that Tuskegee Airmen flew 1,578 combat missions and they were the only fighter group in the Mediterranean, black or white, never to lose a single, solitary bomber under escort.

The Red Ball Express, they landed at Normandy in the wake of D-Day and rushed materiel to supply the rapid Allied advance. The U.S. Army's 761st Tank Battalion, the first black armored unit to see combat in World War II—are they here? [*Applause*] Thank you. They fought bravely at the Battle of the Bulge and did so while in combat for 183 days in a row.

In Europe, North Africa, the Pacific, or state-side, in the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Marines, the Coast Guard, more than a million African-American men and women helped to win this century's greatest fight for freedom. In helping to show the world what America was against, you helped to show America what America is for. You helped to liberate all of us from segregation. The civil rights marches were already underway every time you marched in a uniform. And today, at the end of the cold war, we should do everything we can to pay back the debt we owe, to move forward as a nation as you helped America to move forward after World War II.

Most of you were born in the years after World War I, a time when America came home from victory and retreated from the world, a time in which insecurity arose. As Hitler's hate spread overseas, the Red Scare and the Ku Klux Klan grew up here at home. But after World War II, we avoided a lot of those mistakes. We turned our old adversaries into new allies. We brought prosperity into our own economy, even as we built the global economy. We educated our people for new work and propelled a movement for civil rights that lifted millions of Americans into equal dignity and gave all Americans at least some chance to join the middle class.

Now we have to do what your generation did for us, to guide new democracies into an era of security and prosperity, to renew our own economy, to give hope to our communities,

to give every individual the tools they need to assume personal responsibility for themselves and their families, to prepare our young people for life in the 21st century. And perhaps still most difficult of all, we have got to find a way to work together in this country to make a strength out of our diversity, to prove that in a global economy where the Earth is smaller and smaller, the fact that we are nations of many races and faiths and many backgrounds is a great source of strength if we will tap it with open minds and open hearts.

Here in the Government, the President and the Congress, we have some power to bring more jobs and lower the deficit. We have the power to pass laws that will help people to combat crime and will help to open trading opportunities all around the world. We have the power to pass laws that will give communities the tools they need to rebuild and give families the breaks they need to succeed at work and at home, like the Family Leave Act.

But one thing I've learned here now in nearly 2 years as President: No matter how much progress we make in passing the laws, what goes on in the hearts of our countrymen is still the most important thing. And there is still too much in our country that divides us, too many who see the glass as half-empty instead of half-full. We can win the battles before us. There is no problem we face today that America cannot overcome. But we have to have the spirit and the character and the sheer endurance and faith that so many of you demonstrated by the dignity and courage of your service in the Second World War.

Before I turn the microphone over to Congressman Sanford Bishop of Georgia, who will read the awards as Secretary Brown and I congratulate the honorees, let me say just a word about Haiti, since Congressman Rangel was kind enough to mention it.

As all of you know now, it is a place where terrible atrocities have occurred. After a democratic leader was thrown out and dictators took over, people were murdered, slashed, raped, anything to intimidate them into submission. It is a place where democracy has been taken away, the only place in our entire hemisphere where an elected government was supplanted with a dictatorship. Because of the oppression and the difficulties, it is a place where we have had many immigrants streaming out of it, look-

ing for freedom and relief. And unless we act, there will be more.

I hope you also know that we have bent over backwards now for 3 years to avoid this confrontation. We have sought a peaceful solution, repeatedly. Last year we made an agreement here in the United States; the dictator, General Cedras, came here and signed an agreement in which he promised to leave power in return for a spirit of a reconciliation and humanity, putting the country back together. And then when the day came to keep the deal, he broke it, turned the United Nations away, and now they're even refusing to talk to representatives of the United Nations.

Well, here in our neighborhood, that level of human rights abuse, the loss of democracy through robbery, the continued threat of the instability of immigration, and breaking your word to the United States, United Nations, and all your neighbors, those things are things which cannot stand.

I also want to say, as all of you know, our military is as good as it's ever been, perhaps better than it's ever been. It's more united, more flexible, more modern, and yet more skilled in the old-fashioned virtues and abilities perhaps than ever before. Our leaders have prepared well for this moment, while hoping that

it would not be necessary. But as all of you know, as well as any American, there is no such thing as a risk-free journey in this area.

We have done everything we can to be deliberate and fair. Even at this hour, just a few minutes ago, we had all the members of our coalition, including the Prime Ministers of several of the Caribbean countries, into the White House. President Aristide made a speech in which he said, "No violence, reconciliation. Let's don't do this; let's don't take retribution on each other anymore." This is a right cause, with a country that is near, in our own neighborhood, where the mission is plain and limited and achievable.

And I just want to say to all of you that I honor your contributions, and I know you honor the contributions of all those young men and women in uniform who now are able to achieve their God-given abilities in the service of their country without regard to their race because of what you did.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:59 p.m. at the Longworth House Office Building. The National POW/MIA Recognition Day proclamation of September 14 is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Memorandum on the Federal Plan To Break the Cycle of Homelessness September 16, 1994

Memorandum for the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development

Subject: Federal Plan to Break the Cycle of Homelessness

The Federal Plan to Break the Cycle of Homelessness is a pathbreaking document. The Federal Plan sets forth a comprehensive strategy to create a continuum of care system, consolidate duplicative programs, and more comprehensively address the needs of homeless families and individuals by doubling the Housing and Urban Development's homeless budget.

In short, the Federal Plan is a vital first step in addressing one of my top priorities as President. Because of our deep commitment to ending homelessness and the importance of this

issue to America, I hereby direct you to work towards building and solidifying support across this Nation for the Federal Plan. Our citizens must understand the principles of the Federal Plan. They must be convinced of the importance of our proposed legislation to reorganize HUD's homeless programs, and they must be persuaded of the critical importance of doubling HUD's homeless budget. Most of all, they must understand our eagerness to work in partnership with local governments, not-for-profit providers, advocates, and others to create a comprehensive continuum of care in all our cities and towns.

I am counting on you and the Department to help create the support that the Federal Plan to Break the Cycle of Homelessness deserves.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON